

SB 618 Testimony to House Education Committee

Dr. Vickie L. Markavitch, Oakland Schools

November 29, 2011

There is no argument that educational choice is something Americans want for their children. But I believe that American parents want to make sure that the choices put before them are good ones.

So please tell me, why is there a push for the uncapping of charter and cyber schools without any quality assurance put in place before licensing these entities?

And why is there strong resistance to requiring a review of the success or failure these companies have experienced, before they market themselves to our parents and children?

This I do not understand.

Government makes certain that drugs are deemed safe before they are marketed to the public; the same for automobiles, even our food and the toys we purchase for our children. We need to exercise the same due diligence before allowing failing chains of charter schools to market their way into our children's educational lives.

To do less for the educational choices we bring to our children is irresponsible and one has to ask why the resistance? Why is there resistance to quality assurance prior to licensing? Why is there resistance to requiring management companies who operate these schools to be transparent when spending public tax dollars for education? And, the biggest why – why would the language of these bills allow authorizers of these schools to comingle public K-12 tax dollars with their other funds?

There are good community governed school districts, good charters and even some good cyber schools. But there are also schools in all categories that are not doing well by our children. In the case of our community governed schools, the reform laws you passed last year have the potential to fix what needs to be fixed. But the uncapping of failing charters and cyber schools makes no sense – why would we want to increase the number of failing schools operating in Michigan?

Most of the charter schools that will be taking advantage of an uncapped environment are already operating in Michigan or in other states, and their performance data is already available. We need to use this data prior to licensing these schools. Charters with no operational history should be limited to one or two licenses, until they have data that proves they are successful.

In Oakland County 60% of our charters fall in the bottom quartile of Michigan's Top to Bottom list of schools. I know those schools in the bottom quartile are working very hard to get better. All I am saying is that we should make sure they get better before we allow them to get bigger.

National statistics show over and over again that only one in five charters do better than their community governed counterpart and two do worse – why would we uncap that 40%?

While it is the intent of some to pass this legislation and then address or "fix" the quality component later, later is really too late for children that will be spending a year or more in a school that does not work.

Parents deserve good choices. Children deserve a quality education. Uncap only what works by including an amendment for quality, high-performing schools that are managed with transparency and integrity.